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JOSEPH H. BODWELL

Joseph Henry Bodwell Becomes First County Agent in Piscataquis County

Reprint by permission of article originally appearing in the "Shire Town Conserver", the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society, 2017.

Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society Member, Patricia Leland Mereen, sent this article written by Joseph Bodwell as part of an autobiography written for his grandchildren. He is known as "Gramps" for this reason.

Joseph Henry Bodwell was born in Hallowell, Maine on July 8, 1891, the fourth child of eight. His parents were Willard Arthur Bodwell (1859-1931) and Carrie Alice Gage (1863-1954). He attended the University of Maine, Orono from 1912, graduating in 1915.

On June 24, 1916, he married Irene Pearl Emery in Salem, New Hampshire. They had two sons, Walter Arthur Bodwell (1918-1998) and Ralph Emery Bodwell (1921-2001) and last a daughter, Irene Pearl, born on November 26, 1928. Mother Irene passed away on November 26, 1928 giving birth to their daughter.

On June 19, 1929, he married Eunice Shedd Clark. They had two children: Robert Clark Bodwell (1930-) and Joyce (1934-). Eunice passed away on May 18, 1959. He then married Ethel D. Knapp on September 1, 1959.

Start of a New Job

We now begin the story of "Gramps" and his adventures as the first County Agent of Piscataquis County.

"On September 1, 1915, "Gramps" started his new job as County Agent for Piscataquis County. Dr. Leon S. Merrill was the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Director of the Agricultural Extension Service for the State of Maine. He was an organizer and a wonderful director but he did not pretend to know much about agriculture itself. However, he did make it his business to know the people who did.

Before "Gramps" started his new job, Dr. Merrill invited him to spend three days with him going over his future work. He supplied "Gramps" with information about the Service, the men who were agents for other counties and the reports turned in by these agents. He also introduced "Gramps" to Maurice Jone who had worked two years as County Agent for Penobscot County and who was more help to "Gramps" in his new work than any other man. "Gramps" was also sent from one department head to another in order to get acquainted with all Agricultural College personnel and for whatever help they could give him in his future work.

When the three days with Dr. Merrill were over, "Gramps" expected that he would be given material to take with him to start his new job. Instead, he was surprised when told merely to report for work the next morning in Dover, Maine.

“Gramps’ asked “But who do I report to?”

“You will start out by hiring a horse and wagon and making calls on the farmers to get acquainted. Then you select farmers with whom you will carry on demonstrations. All I expect from you,” Dr. Merrill told him, ‘is a report each week stating what you have done.”

He went on “Just one more requirement. When you make an appointment with a person, a Grange or any other club, to tell of our Extension work, be sure to always meet at the time you agreed upon. Establish an office and I will come up to visit you when you get settled.”

If “Gramps” had not had the experience working for the American Steel and Wire Company for two summers, he certainly would have been lost right at the start. But upon arriving in Dover by train “Gramps” immediately set out looking for both an office and a place to stay. Right in the center of town, “Gramps” found both. There was a building between two roads that formed a Y in the center of town and upstairs in the building there was a room for rent which “Gramps” took. (The Observer Building?). Across the street there were two stores in a building. The Dover Water Department rented one and as the other was vacant, “Gramps” immediately rented it for his office. Across from the building to the left was a boarding house where “Gramps” arranged to take his meals when he was in town.

Remember, that first year that “Gramps” was County Agent he traveled either by horse and wagon, which he rented from the Annis Livery Stable (owned and operated by Stanley A. Annis, 1866-1939), or else he went by train. He would hire a livery rig and go from one town to another, putting his horse up at another livery stable and staying at a hotel at night in the town where he had worked that day. He made from 15 to 20 farm calls each day trying to make new friends. At first however, he did not make much headway. But because of the experience that “Gramps” had in organizing the demonstrations for the American Steel and Wire Company for two summers while going to college, along with his practical experience on his Dad’s farm, the work at the Agricultural Experimental Station, the feeding and supervising of hogs for his thesis, the work on the farm with brother Frank in the Dells of the Wisconsin, and his competing with the judging team while at college, all contributed finally in making it possible to get a start as County Agent for Piscataquis County.

To better tell of the many trials and tribulations experienced by “Gramps” during this period, he is going to include a story that was written about him earlier for publication. It was known as “The Whipper Snapper” and that is what your “Gramps” will be known as in the story that tells how he really got his start.

The Whipper Snapper

“As far as I am concerned, I will have absolutely nothing to do with this little “whipper snapper” that they are sending over from the Agricultural College at the University of Maine. And furthermore, I would advise all of you farmers not to have anything to do with him either.”

This was the strong admonition of the Master of the Pomona Grange of Piscataquis County that evening in 1915 at the South Dover Grange Hall. The meeting had been called

by Frank Merrill who discussed the news of the appointment of a County Agent and what to do about him when he arrived in their county.

Over 300 farmers and their wives were in attendance to hear “Uncle Frank”, as the popular Grange Master was known throughout the county, expound on what he thought of the appointment. From his remarks, nobody doubted that the going ahead would be anything but smooth for the young man that “Uncle Frank” had so sarcastically referred to as that little “whipper snapper”.

The Grange Master was certainly one of the best farmers in the whole county as well as one of the most influential. He boasted a nice herd of Holstein cattle and some Percheron draft horses that were the talk of the area. In addition, he grew more pigs than any other farmer around. But primarily he was a potato grower and annually raised 50 acres or more of Maine’s principle agricultural export product.

At the meeting “Uncle Frank” was heard to scoff, “Can you imagine the college sending us this fellow to show us how to farm? What will this young squirt know about the real problems of running a farm? All he knows is what he has read in books. Bah!”

But Dr. Leon S. Merrill was Dean of the Agricultural College and Director of the Extension Service at that time and he was just as sold on the merits of the program as “Uncle Frank” was set against them. Dr. Merrill was always thorough in selecting the men he sent out to pioneer the new county extension program. He hired only those who had been brought up on large farms. In the case of Piscataquis County, he had selected a young man who was now being referred to as the “whipper snapper”. For two years Dr. Merrill had his eye on this young man. He had got him jobs testing milk at various large farms near Orono and had in general, schooled him in all the latest advances in agricultural technology. In addition, the new agent had written his thesis on the proportionate gain of meat to grain in the raising of pigs. This work came in very handy later but his most important qualification for the new job was that he had been raised on a large farm very similar to those of Piscataquis County.

The “whipper snapper” began his new job with great expectations, not having been told what was said about him at the Grange meeting in South Dover. He called on farmer after farmer and was able to command their interest until each learned his identity. When he told them that he was the new County Agent, they immediately dismissed him and found other things to do. This went on for days and even weeks until it got to the discouraging point of his considering another position. But hating to admit defeat, he gave himself one more week in which to prove his worth to the farmers.

It was near the middle of what might have been the final week of a budding career that quite by chance he called upon a farmer named Frank Chandler. It was only then that he learned about the Grange meeting and the plot that had been advanced to discredit him.

Frank Chandler instantly took a liking to this young “whipper snapper” and said that before he gave up and quit his new job he should go over to Frank Merrill’s farm and show that one could work on a farm even if he did have a head full of theories.

So, a counter plot was hatched and the final advice to the new County Agent by Frank Chandler was, “Now remember, young feller, do just what he tells you and don’t say much yourself until you get the lay of the land. And no matter what he says or how insulting he becomes, pay no attention to him. His bark is a lot worse than his bite.”

Mr. Chandler told him that he should arrive at the Merrill farm between 11:00 and 11:30 a.m. the next day as it was the custom of the farmers in the county to keep their

clocks about a half hour fast. He would therefore arrive just before dinner and would find “Uncle Frank” busy feeding the horses as he did daily at this time. He also said that all the farmers in the neighborhood would be at the Merrill farm the next day helping “Uncle Frank” fill his silo. It would therefore be a good time for the new agent to talk to a large group of local farmers in an attempt to promote his program, perhaps for the very last time.

The youthful County Agent followed Frank Chandler’s directions to a “T” and sure enough, the next day as he drove into the yard in his hired rig, there was “Uncle Frank” preparing to feed his horses. The neighbors who were helping him had already gone into the house to dinner, it being almost noon and the crew having had worked since early morning. As “Uncle Frank” was making haste to finish feeding the horses he was far from cordial. In fact, he could best be described as 240 pounds of pure sarcasm.

He bluntly told his young visitor “Feed that nag of yours six quarts of my best oats and then come to the house for dinner. We make it a point to feed dogs, tramps and anyone else that shows up here at mealtime. But in your case, I want the victuals to stop your mouth ‘cause we don’t want to hear anything around here out of you.” The young man and his chief adversary had at last come face to face and the opening round was all “Uncle Frank’s” as the younger man refused to banter words with his host at that point and remained quiet as he had been advised.

It was a sumptuous meal prepared by Mrs. Merrill and the ladies of the neighborhood. Everyone enjoyed it, even the uninvited guest who was the butt of many caustic remarks by the head of the household during the meal. The “whipper snapper” remained silent until everyone had finished eating. The he arose and said politely “Mr. and Mrs. Merrill, I want to thank you for this delicious dinner. This gathering reminds me of those we used to have at my own home back on the farm where I was raised. It is also reminiscent of the threshing crews I worked with out in Sycamore, Illinois. It is good to see neighbors pulling together to help one another both in the field and in the home.

For those snide remarks made about me during dinner regarding my new job in this county, I know they were all said in fun. My job as County Agent can be compared to just what is happening here on your farm today, namely neighbors cooperating with one another to aid in a common cause. This is exactly the aim of the Extension Service, bringing to all farmers good practices that are found in other places. They might be from the University of Maine, from an experimental station or from another farmer just like yourself.”

The room was quiet and the “whipper snapper” knew that he had captured the full attention of everyone. He quickly pursued his advantage by saying “I noticed as I drove up today you have a beautiful field of potatoes growing. I would appreciate it if you could find just ten minutes of your valuable time to show me that field of potatoes. After that I will go into your silo and help your crew tread silage the rest of the afternoon.”

Mr. Merrill hesitated, but the youthful County Agent would not be denied. He turned to the other men in the room and asked them the question, “Is that not a fair bargain, ten minutes for a half days work?”

The others were enthused and answered in unison, “Come on Frank, what have you got to lose?”

The men trailed out of the house and over to the nearby potato field. The “whipper snapper” knew that he had come to that moment when he had to do something spectacular, and do it quickly, if he was ever to win the confidence of the highly-respected “Uncle Frank” Merrill.

Fortunately for the new County Agent, he had spent considerable time working at an experimental station on tuber diseases and spied a hill of potatoes that he recognized as having rhizoctonia. He turned to his host and said "That's a funny hill over there, isn't it?"

Mr. Merrill roared back "What's so funny about it? It's one of the best looking hills in the whole field."

"That hill," and here the "whipper snapper" paused for effect before continuing on "has, I would say, maybe 30 worthless little potatoes and perhaps a couple of knobby ones in it."

"Now I know you don't know what you are talking about, young feller" roared "Uncle Frank" as he glowered at the younger man.

"Well, as it is near digging time, Mr. Merrill, and before you call me a liar, may I suggest that you pull that hill."

"By Godfrey, I will." With that, he lunged forward and with one mighty pull, yanked the hill from the ground. Crestfallen, he looked at the nest of small, unsaleable potatoes that he had unearthed. He gasped, then said "You're right but it was only a lucky guess on your part."

"Well then, you might enjoy pulling up that hill over there."

"And what will I find in that one", the Grange Master asked.

"Roughly I would say in that hill you will find six or eight good potatoes and no small ones."

Again, the host lunged to pull up a hill in an attempt to prove the new County Agent wrong, but again as before, the prediction given by the "whipper snapper" proved to be too accurate to be mere chance. The chiding ceased and "Uncle Frank" led a thoughtful group of farmers back to work. The County Agent trailed after them and for the remainder of the day, fulfilled his obligation by working in the silo with the rest of the men. At the end of the day, Frank Merrill astonished the group by asking the County Agent if he would consider returning to his farm early the following morning.

It was exactly 4 a.m. the next morning when the young "whipper snapper" arrived back at the Merrill farm. No one was up but he nevertheless pounded brashly on the front door. The noise brought forth a bellow from an upstairs window. "What in tarnation is going on down there?"

"Oh, you're not up yet?" the young man called asked in mock amazement. "I thought farmers would surely be up and at work by this time."

Actually, he had hired a horse and left Dover at 2:00 a.m. that morning just to be sure that he would have himself in this situation.

"I thought", he went on, "that you might like to teach me how to milk."

"Well, I will be right down and maybe I can teach a thing or two to you that isn't learned from books over at the college."

Now milking cows certainly isn't learned from books, so "Uncle Frank" thought that he would be able to teach the your "whipper snapper" something when it came to milking. What he didn't know was that the young County Agent had grown up on a farm where his father had owned more cows than there were on the Merrill farm, and that the "whipper snapper" had been milking cows by hand since he was seven years old and at one time had milked 35 cows this way at one session.

Once his ability to milk cows had been established, he was more and more accepted at the Merrill farm and at other farms in the area. Mrs. Merrill, a kindly lady who had taken an instant liking to the young man, told him that he should not hesitate to tell Mr. Merrill that “I learned that in college”, every time that he brought up a point that proved the veteran farmer to be wrong. “Uncle Frank” proved to be a good sport and it was not long before the County Agent was invited to attend one of the Pomona Grange meetings.

During the course of the meeting, the Grange Master who had been a nemesis of all college-trained farmers only a short time before, rapped for attention, stood up and said, “Now Joe Bodwell, I want you to come up here while I make a public apology.”

To the gathering he said “You all remember what I said just a few short months ago about that little “whipper snapper”, but brothers and sisters, if you can’t use his help and his knowledge around your places then he will be found working at my farm all of the time.”

“Uncle Frank” Merrill was good to his word and did all that he could to undo any harm that he might have done to the young County Agent and to the Extension Service. He was a constant source of inspiration and gave unstintingly of his time, money and support to benefit the Agricultural Extension Service of the entire state as long as he lived.

To the youthful County Agent, he became a second father. When the “whipper snapper” married, he was given a baked bean supper by “Uncle Frank” for over 70 friends and neighbors, including Dr. Leon S. Merrill, Director of the Extension Service. He possesses to this day a picture taken at the supper, a picture not only filled with faces of friends of a by-gone era, but filled with many wonderful and poignant memories.

Poultry Physical Exam

There were many other interesting things that happened to your “Gramps” when he first started as County Agent. We have told about Frank Merrill and how “Gramps” won him over, but afterwards there were still many doubting Thomas types of people that he had to prove his worth to in his new career.

At college, “Gramps” had met a young man who came from Dover. His name was Clyde Brown but he had only stayed at the college two years before going back to his home town and starting in the poultry business.

He lived near the local Grange Hall and one day he came to “Gramps” office and invited him to give a talk at the Hall on how to tell by physical examination the probability of hens’ laying capacity. The date was set and the young man got 25 young poultrymen of the area to come to the meeting and to hear the lecture. They were all about the same age and they thought they would have some fun with the new County Agent.

“Gramps” started to tell them that the pigment color was an important thing to note. That on the beak, the skin, and on the front and back of the legs the color would be a deep yellow before the bird began to lay. Then, as the hen started to lay, the color would begin to fade, first on the beak, then the skin and then the front and back of the legs because this color went into the yolk of the egg. It was at this point that the audience began fooling and making foolish remarks, so “Gramps” knew he would have to give them a visual demonstration. He turned to Clyde Brown and said “Brownie, you have some hens in your hen house right next door do you not?”

He said he did so “Gramps” asked him to take a couple of his friends and go bring back a crate of them so that he could show them what he was talking about.

A long table was placed in front of the group and a crate of eight hens placed on it. “Gramps” knew he would have to get their attention with something they had never seen before. He thought of something he had discovered when taking care of his own hens.

He told Brownie to hold one hen while he held another. He said, “Look at the legs on these birds. The hen Brownie has hardly any color to them while this bird has a deep yellow color.”

This held their attention for a moment. “Gramps” was getting the birds ready to place on the table where they would expect to see it fly away, thereby having another laugh on him. But “Gramps” casually laid the bird on the table and, turning to Brownie, seemed to forget the bird completely.

“Gramps” said “Let’s have your hen now and you get another one out of the crate for more comparison.” You could hear a pin drop.

Brownie, who had never seen this done before, pointed to the hen that “Gramps” had put on the table and then turned his back on. “Aren’t you going to tie down that bird so that it won’t be flying all around the Hall?” Brownie asked.

“Oh, no need to do that. The hen will stay right there. Now birdie, you be sure to stay right where you are.” Then “Gramps” took a few minutes to describe other birds before returning to the bird on the table. Then he said “Guess we don’t need you any more birdie. We’ll put you back in the crate while we put another bird on the table.” This was repeated with each bird in the crate and his audience was quiet as a mouse during the total demonstration. They had not paid much attention to “Gramps” lecture but they certainly were entranced by the birds remaining motionless on the table.

Finally, they could contain themselves no longer. “How do you do that?” they asked “Gramps” in unison.

“Do what?” “Gramps” replied.

“Why, putting a hen on a table and making it stay like that.”

“Don’t you men all raise hens?” “Gramps” asked them. They replied in the affirmative.

“Then you’ve got to be kidding me. Any poultryman can make them do that.” But he never told them how he did it. Instead he just laughed good naturedly and said “You guys are all a great bunch of kidders. Trying to make me believe you don’t know how to do it.” From then on “Gramps” never had anything but real fine cooperation from this young group of men.

Uncle Frank’s Telephone Call

“Gramps” recalls how “Uncle Frank” Merrill received an urgent letter from a businessman in Boston one day. The matter was so urgent that Mr. Merrill either had to get the man on the phone at once or else he would have to take a train from Dover and go to Boston. In those days, a trip to Boston meant an eight-mile drive by horse and buggy to the station in Dover, putting the horse up at the livery stable and taking the train to Boston which meant an overnight stay before returning via the same route the next day to get home.

The telephone lines in those days had many parties on them and it was very difficult to reach Central at times. “Uncle Frank” was a great man to swear when he got upset and

after trying many times to get Central by cranking continuously, he was most upset when they still did not answer. He soon was swearing at everyone on the line but he still had not reached Central to place his urgent call to Boston. It was at this moment, when he was swearing the most, that the operator finally answered. She began to berate him for his strong language.

“Now young lady, you just keep your shirt on. I must get this toll call through to Boston at once. We will talk about the other later.”

She finally got the call through and it turned out he did not have to make a trip to Boston after all. But the young lady was not satisfied, but went to the manager and demanded that Frank Merrill apologize to her.

The manager went to see Frank Merrill and he said that he would be glad to apologize. He went down to the telephone office the next day where three operators were busily at work. He asked in a booming voice “Where is that young lady I told to keep her shirt on?” She was pointed out to him.

He looked her straight in the eye, and in an equally loud voice, said “Young lady, I have changed my mind. You can take it off now. Goodbye.” Frank Merrill turned and left the stunned room.

Three Days and Two Nights

If we go back to 1917, we find traveling conditions very different from today, especially during the winter months. All travel was done by train or horse and sleigh. Sometimes it took many hours to go a few miles because of dirt roads or snow drifts. There were two counties that joined each other but their county seats were hours apart because of these travel conditions. They were Somerset and Piscataquis counties. Two friends, both University of Maine College of Agriculture graduates, were County Agents in these two counties, Bob Stiles in Somerset and “Gramps” in Piscataquis. They were very similar in their desire to be of service to the farmers of Maine though neither had any great desire to become rich or to do anything spectacular. They just like to do the work necessary to be successful in their jobs and to give everything they had to make the life of farming more profitable for the farmers in their counties.

Bob had no bad habits unless it was smoking which at that time many people frowned on although it was not considered too sinful. It was during this time the Extension Service had inaugurated what is known as “three days and nights” agricultural schools for adults. One type of school was the dairy school which was held in different towns throughout the state. The instructors of the school were the various County Agents, generally three for each school. When dairy schools were held, County Agents better versed in dairy were selected and would go from one county to another as there were few, if any, specialists in the beginning.

As both Bob and “Gramps” had studied animal husbandry, when dairy schools were held they were usually sent out together with a third man who would be the County Agent in the county where the school was being held.

To show how tedious traveling was in those days, “Gramps” uses this for an example. One time a school was being held in Wellington, a town in Piscataquis County. “Gramps” lived in Dover, about 25 miles away, but to get there by train he had to go to Newport Junction 30 miles away, wait for several hours before taking the train to St. Albans

where he changed trains to Cambridge. There got a mail stage to Wellington, altogether a distance of 70 miles which took a full day to travel. Or he could hire a horse and sleigh or wagon to go over the dirt roads. At that time, there were only eight miles of improved roads in either county.

Whenever these schools were held, the instructors would stay overnight at some farm home or at a boarding house. There was no electricity in the rural territory at that time nor were there any central heating systems. Homes were heated by stoves or fireplaces so it was a constant operation to keep fires going in the winter when the temperature got down as low as 40 degrees below zero. Light was supplied by kerosene lamps and if one did not watch carefully, the chimney would get smoked up or the lamp would run out of kerosene or the wick would become too short.

One occasion that comes to "Gramps" mind took place in the town of Harmony at a three-day dairy school. The three instructors were "Gramps", Bob and another County Agent named Paul Monohan. It was decided the three would stay at a boarding house run by an old maid who usually did not take in men boarders. But Bob Stiles, who could always make friends with anyone, got in to her good graces and she allowed them to stay. She was an unusual cook and that meant a lot to the young instructors. Bob had told her that the other two instructors were just as gentlemanly as he was, so it was arranged that the three would stay at her home during the three days of the school. However, she agreed only with the warning "The least sign of roughhouse and out you all go and you, Bob, will never be able to stay here again."

The three ate dinner and supper at her house the first day without incident, but when it came time to retire to their room they found a double bed and a single bed in it. At once the problem arose, which of the three would get the single bed. The three drew lots to decide and it came out that Bob won the single bed while Paul and "Gramps" had to sleep in the double bed.

Now if by lot Paul had won the single bed, this story would not need to be told. He was only 5 feet, 2 inches tall but weighed about 250 pounds. He really needed a bed by himself.

In those days men wore nightshirts instead of pajamas. Beds were cold and rooms were colder. Outside that night, it was below zero and soon another problem developed, who was going to blow out the lamp and then get into bed. You see, the large room was cold and as so one had slippers, nobody wanted the task of blowing out the lamp and then crossing the cold floor in his bare feet.

But the lot fell to Paul so "Gramps" and Bob got into bed. Paul said "Get those comforters ready so I won't catch cold." Then he quickly blew out the light and dove for the bed, shouting "Balliver Boot Feet, here I come."

He hit the bed and there was a mighty crash as the bed spring and supports went right to the floor. Immediately there was a knock on the door and a very wrathful landlady shouted "You boys open this door at once."

Three very chagrined young men lighted the lamp and stood in their nightshirts with heads bowed while the landlady lambasted them for their deviltry. She said 'You are not the gentlemen that I was led to believe you were. I told you if there was any roughhouse here, you would have to get out. I'll give you just 30 minutes to leave',

The three had to find another place for the night which was not easy at that late hour. It was also the last time that Bob could stay at her home even though money was sent to pay for the damage.

The First 4-H Club Agent

Before the first year of his work was completed, “Gramps” was having more to do than he could handle alone. He asked the farmers to organize a Farm Bureau to assist in the work with a president, vice president, secretary-treasurer and a committee with a chairman for each type of work to be handled by the group.

The first club agent chairman was Mrs. Daisy Smith of Dover (1877-1968), who is still living today though well over 90 years of age. Last year “Gramps” wrote a story about her activities because she was a state-wide promoter of Extension Service as well as other state projects. The following letter was printed in the Piscataquis Observer, the county news organ, and is written from the standpoint of “Gramps” title when he worked in the county.

<p>Piscataquis Observer Dover-Foxcroft, Maine</p> <p>Dear Sir,</p> <p>I am enclosing a short article in tribute to Daisy Smith, which if you can find space in paper to print, I would appreciate very much. You may use as much, or as little, of it as you wish.</p> <p>Follows the story as it was printed:</p>	<p>118 Main Street Farmington, Maine 04938</p> <p>Sincerely, Joseph H. Bodwell First County Agent Piscataquis County</p>
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Daisy Smith, who writes for your paper, was a tireless worker for the Extension Service from the time I went to Piscataquis County as its first County Agricultural Agent in 1915 until I left in 1920 to take a similar position in Hampden County, Springfield, Mass. Daisy, as everyone called her, was connected with a majority of community activities. Now over 90 years old, she is still active as residents of your county fully know. Most people know of her contributions in her later life, but I thought that some would like to know of the things she did when I knew her then.

From the beginning, she was intensely interested in 4-H club work with which I was also connected. She started the Jolly Worker Girls Club in 1915 and was leader of this group until very recently when she turned the leadership over to Mrs. Elizabeth Drake. This was the first 4-H club organized in Piscataquis County and only the second one in the State of Maine. I believe it to be the only club that has continued to be active from an inception date of that era to the present time.

An incident that stands out in my mind after all these years concerns the time that she asked me to show her the new method of “dry” killing and dressing chickens. Daisy kept a large flock of hens and delivered many dressed poultry to her customers. As I recall, she used to sell from 30 to 50 each month, doing all the work herself, including the killing.

In the operation of killing chickens by the “dry” method, it is necessary to penetrate the brain of the bird with a sharp instrument. This loosens the feathers for easier dressing.

I recall showing Daisy the procedure but she was too gentle the first time she tried it. I told her to press harder with the blade. The next time she pressed too hard and badly cut her own hand. She passed the accident off with a sage remark that she had learned her lesson well, though the hard way, and would not likely forget it. So saying, she washed her cut hand and went on to kill five more birds that day just to prove it to one and all. This is an isolated incident out of her past but it exemplifies the sterling qualities of this fine woman.

All her life Daisy has been active in Women’s Extension Club work. When I was County Agent there, there were no Home Demonstration Agents at the beginning, so an agent from Orono came up periodically. Daisy was always there to meet her and to go about the County organizing new clubs. She was truly the outstanding leader of her day.

But perhaps she contributed her most humane self in the rearing of foster children in her home. More than 30 children knew her as a foster parent, and while some were with her only a short time, others remained for much of their young lives. One girl, who came to her at the age of five, was adopted by Daisy when she turned 18 so as to enable her to attend college.

In her later life, Daisy was interested and active in many community, county and state projects, the most recent being the organizing of campaigns to clean up unsightly auto junkyards. She became State Chairman and with a former governor of the state worked unceasingly in cleaning up these junkyards. Their accomplishments were many and the results gratifying to the beautification of the state.

These are just a few of the pleasant thoughts and memories that come to mind when I think of this grand lady and of the years I spent in your area. I hope she will have many years more to enjoy the fruits of her many diversified works.

Daisy’s Response

In answer to the above story that appeared in the Observer, Daisy Smith wrote the following letter to “Gramps”:

Dear Friend Joe - - What a surprise you gave me when I read the article in the Observer. I thought I was all done receiving bouquets, but that was one of the nicest. Yes the Jolly Worker 4-H Club is still in existence. Now the oldest in the state, I gave up being leader of it when I was asked to be the County leader. There have been quite a few leaders during those many years. Mrs. Elizabeth Drake, who was to be the leader this year of the beginners, passed away suddenly week before last. Her mother-in-law will take over the older group.

Yes, I did keep on sticking hens. Eugene (1871-1953) would help me get the feathers off. One month I dressed, with Eugene’s help, 100 broilers for the Blethen House.

Katheryn had asked me to write up all of my activities. They are legion. I remember about the time a building was being moved from Sebec Road to the outskirts of

East Dover. It took two days, three pair of oxen and plenty of drink to get it moved. Of course, quite a crowd gathered to watch proceedings.

Then there was the time three East Dover men went to Montana and brought home a carload of horses. They had an auction and the Grange furnished dinner for 10 cents a person. Also, there was that big Agricultural Fair here. We got quite a stipend from the State on that. If I do write them up, I can find enough to last quite a while. But I have to keep busy at something as long as my eyes hold out. I am quite blind, hardening of the arteries and slow growing cataracts. No cure for them.

I can't see to write very well so you will have to guess at much of it. Thank you for the nice article. Regards to the Mrs. from an old has been.

Daisy

Note: We are sorry to report that since this section was written, Daisy Smith has passed away. Her death was noted in the Waterville Sentinel of November 19, 1968. Her age was given as 91.

“Gramps”

1916 Extension Highlights

The secretary of the Farm Bureau was F. W. Leland and the show some of the accomplishments of the Extension Service, the following summary was printed in the Observer in 1916 –

“Our County is one of the fortunate ones in having an active county farm demonstrator. He is Joseph H. Bodwell. In conjunction with the demonstration work Mr. Bodwell has stimulated much interest in girls' and boys' clubs. He has also held three extension schools. Last year it took considerable work by Mr. Bodwell, assisted by a good committee, to get these classes for extension schools, while without any soliciting from anyone. Eight schools have already been asked for for the coming winter.

Demonstrations given during the year have been of two classes, economic production demonstrations and comparative demonstrations. Swine raising was not receiving any great attention before our county agent took up the work. Pigs were raised but as a side issue only, and not one farmer, I venture to say, knew the exact profit or loss from this branch of farming. As Mr. Bodwell was sure that there were great possibilities for profit in raising swine, he put a large amount of time and effort into this branch. As a result, five registered boars and 12 registered sows have been purchased in the county. In following the county agents instructions, Ralph Gray of Dover reports a net profit of \$135 on 15 pigs sold at an average age of five months. E. W. Livermore of Sebec reports a growth on 85-pound Berkshire pigs of 1.9 pounds per pig per day in ten days, which is extra good for pigs at that age. The lowest profit reported is \$4.50 per pig. These profits have been made on purchased feeds only. Next year Mr. Bodwell hopes to have demonstrations on pasturing and home-grown feeds.

Among those adopting the self-feeder are N. D. Noyes, Ralph Gray, Frank Merrill, Herbert Merrill, F. M. Crommet, V. L. Gould, Perley Sawyer, S. D. Weymouth, all of Dover; M. B. McKusick, of Guilford; F. Watson of Parkman; R. E. Dudley of Abbot; C.

W. Livermore of Sebec; Gilman Brothers of Foxcroft; and Vernon Bridges and J. W. Leland of Sangerville.”

The one thing that the dairy committee chairman asked “Gramps” to do was to organize a cow test association. Mr. Ernest Livermore of Sebec came to “Gramps” office one day in February and asked if “Gramps” would come to his farm the next day and interview farmers in the neighborhood in an attempt to secure members for the County Cow Test Association.

The funny thing about it was that he reiterated the request three times. Each time he also added “Now, if it should snow, you will come just the same won’t you, because I can go better with you if it does snow”.

Well snow it did and it continued to snow and blow all night and also the next morning. “Gramps” went to see Mr. Annis who owned a livery stable and asked him to hitch up a horse and sleigh with which to go to Sebec.

Mr. Annis said, “No sir. I would not let a horse out today. You might not make it because of the drifts”.

“Gramps” told him, “O.K., but if you will look at your books you will find that I have paid you enough money in rentals to own two of your horses already. If you won’t rent an outfit to me, I will have to buy a horse and sleigh myself and you will be out of a steady customer”.

“Well” he said, “I will do it but you are the only one I would do it for”.

So “Gramps” started out through the snow with an old patient and quiet horse. Just the same, the sleigh tipped over four times before he reached Sebec two hours later. “Gramps” was all but frozen when he reached Mr. Livermore’s home. He took one look at “Gramps” and said “You darn fool, don’t you know anything? We can’t go anywhere on a day like today.”

“Gramps” said “I’m sorry, but you remember what you told me. You said to be sure and come even if it snowed hard. So here I am. Now Ernest we are going to put my horse in your barn and then take your draught horse and hitch him to a sled and make those calls.”

They called on eight farmers that day and each of them signed up in the Association. As they told the two men, “If you can come out to tell us about it on a day like today, the least we can do is to sign up for it.”

A week later, Ernest and Frank Chandler came to “Gramps” office and Frank asked “Joe, can you come down tomorrow to call on farmers in my territory about joining the Cow Test Association?”

“Hold it, Frank” broke in Ernest, “guess you don’t know about this darn fool and his visits.” He then went on to tell Frank what had happened when “Gramps” had gone to his house the week before. Anyway, they got a full quota to join the new association and when it came time to find a cow tester, “Gramps” recommended Arthur Bower, a friend from Methuen, Mass. and a graduate of the University of Maine.

He tells about his experiences, his visiting and testing of cows in the county, in the following letter:

“I think I started the first of July 1916 as tester for the Piscataquis County Tester Association. I stayed just a year and then enlisted in the army, World War 1. My year as tester was an eventful one as I met many fine people including Frank Merrill, Chandler,

the Lelands, Foss, Sturtevant, Brockway, Ernest Livermore, the Snow Brothers and many others.

I joined the Grange at South Dover and met just about everyone in the territory. Getting around to the different farms was not quite as easy as today. The snow was not plowed but rolled with a big roller pulled by six horses. It made great sleighing except when it thawed in the spring. Then your sleigh would almost disappear but we made it O.K. and always arrived on time.

I remember one time Frank Merrill complained that the creamery did not give him as good a test as I did and couldn't find out why. I did. The trouble was, Mrs. Merrill used to take a ladle and help herself from the top of the cans of milk that had been setting all night. Everything sure tasted good with cream on it but it was no wonder the creamery test was a little low.

Another time Frank had a Berkshire sow that had a hard time having her young so I helped out and delivered a small litter.

On another occasion a young colt had banged its neck on a 2x4 in the stall and had developed a rather large infection. This I opened and drained and soon had it cleaned out. Several cases of milk fever and test trouble were corrected but it seemed as a tester, I was getting quite a reputation as a vet."

First Car

As "Gramps" has mentioned several times, there were mostly only dirt roads in Maine in 1915 and they were very narrow. There were very few cars in use. Piscataquis County had eight miles of Macadamized road, starting from Dover and going toward Dexter.

In the spring of 1916, "Gramps" bought his first car, a Ford coupe (Model A). It had a leather top and removable sides over the one seat. There was a running board along each side and on one side there was a box of tools with plenty of patches with which to mend the rubber inner tube that went inside the outer casing of the tire. The tire was smooth on the surface rather than being treaded as they are today.

In the tool box there was a jack used to raise up one side of the car to remove the tire when one got a puncture. A tire would not average to run more than 3,000 miles and if one could drive a hundred miles without getting a puncture, he was extremely lucky. On the other running board was installed the necessary equipment for the carbide lights which were used for night driving. There was no heating equipment nor windshield wipers on the cars those days either.

There were two sections to the windshield with the upper section being on hinges so it could be opened by pushing outward. One can imagine driving in a heavy rain. It meant either raising the upper section of the windshield or looking out the side to see the road.

There were very few cars in the county when "Gramps" bought the first Ford so there must have been more than ten horse drawn vehicles to each automobile on the road. Horses in those days were not used to cars and would shy away from them which meant many "tip overs". Because of this danger, a law was passed requiring the auto driver to get out and help lead the horse around the car whenever it became necessary. You can imagine how few miles per hour could be driven under such conditions.

“Gramps” has said previously that when he first started Extension Service work, he often went over to Penobscot County to see how Maurice Jones, the County Agent over there, was doing. He not only helped “Gramps” much in the new work but he was also the one that taught “Gramps” how to drive. At first the car ended up in the gutter but “Gramps” soon mastered the technique of driving but still, several funny occasions occurred during his first month of driving.

He recalled the time the State Club Leader came to Dover Foxcroft and went with “Gramps” in the car to call on prospective leaders of 4-H club work. Upon returning to the garage that night, “Gramps” drove in and without thinking, yelled “Whoa”. About that time, the car struck the end of the garage which fortunately stopped the motor so no serious results took place. The worst of it was, The Club Leader would thereafter always holler “whoa, whoa” just to let “Gramps” know when he wanted him to stop the car. You see, “Gramps” had always driven horses before and it was difficult to get used to the change.

Another incident happened a few days later. “Gramps” took a ride to see Charles Chandler about eight miles away. He hadn’t gone far when his car stopped and “Gramps” discovered he was out of gas.

There was no home nearby but soon another car came along carrying the driver and two girls. The driver turned out to be “Gramps” friend, Walter True. Never was “Gramps” so embarrassed. One of the girls was Walt’s sister so Walt started right in teasing “Gramps” about the situation. “Well, Joe, you always took pains to feed your horse well but I guess you don’t feed your car as well as you did your horse. Don’t you know you have to feed your auto with gas?”

The two girls giggled at “Gramps” expense which rather upset him, being made such a laughing stock by his friend. Then Walter went on to say “I carry an extra gallon of gas with me for just such occasions as this. Perhaps you had better do so also in the future”.

“Gramps” took the gasoline and poured it into his tank. He told Walter he would either take the container and bring it back to him the next day or else he would pay him then for the gasoline.

“Oh, no Joe” Walter said “I always like to oblige a friend only let this be a lesson to you. If you are going to drive a car you have got to learn to feed it well with gasoline.” They left “Gramps” by his car and drove off laughing heartily.

When “Gramps” got back to town he bought a container of gas to carry with him in the future. Bet you do not know the sequel to all this but you will find it interesting.

The very next Sunday “Gramps” went for a ride to see another friend out on the same road, and you guessed it, Walter and the two girls were stopped not far from where “Gramps” car had stopped without gas the week before. “I’m afraid we’re out of gas.”

“That’s nothing” “Gramps” said with a smile “I had that same trouble myself once.” Whereupon “Gramps” gave him the extra gas with which to get back to town. He helped Walter pour the gas and then told him that he’d see him later, and away “Gramps” went.

The next day Walter came to see “Gramps” and said “Joe, why did you not make fun of me like I did you. Those two girls have done nothing but make me feel cheap every since. They say that you are a gentleman because you did not make fun of me when I ran out of gas. I would twice rather you had belittled me than they”.

That was the first and only time in his life that “Gramps” ever ran out of gas when driving his own car. The rule he has followed ever since is to fill up his tank whenever the

half-full mark was reached or as soon afterwards as possible. "Gramps" learned that it may not be your fault in getting in a jam the first time but it sure is if you repeat the same mistake the second time.

Another event that happened with the car proved to be one not as fortunate as the one just related. It was very seldom that "Gramps" ever went fishing because in those days, it was the custom to work six full days a week, starting at 7 a.m. and not quitting until 5 p.m. After that we attended meetings of various kinds to discuss agricultural problems.

This one time however a farmer friend who lived near Abbot Pond in Abbot called and asked him to come up fishing for white perch Sunday morning, which he did. They had great luck, and "Gramps" alone caught 36 fish. He stayed the day with his friend but by night fall it had started to rain. On the way home, he put the car's acetylene lights on. Just beyond Guilford, "Gramps" noted lights coming towards him which were weaving from side to side. He drove off on to the edge of the road and jumped out of the car on the right side. Just about that time the oncoming car crashed into his car completely taking off the running board on the left side.

Two boys about 20 years of age got out of the car and one of them said "Oh, what will my father say to me now?"

"Gramps" said to him "You had better ask me what I am going to say to you right now. Tomorrow I want you to bring your father down here and we will show him just what you have done."

They all had to walk home in the rain. However, the boys only had a little way to go but "Gramps" had to walk seven miles in the drenching rain. The boy's father showed up the next day however, and paid for fixing "Gramps" car.

One time it was arranged to have several speakers from the Extension to speak at a day long meeting of the Pomona Grange at Parkman. The speakers were George Yeaton to discuss Fruit Culture, Dr. Leon S. Merrill to more fully explain the Extension program, Prof. George Simmons the head of the Agronomy Department at the U of M, and "Gramps". It was "Gramps" as County Agent to also introduce the speakers and to explain the connection of the county program to their specialties.

To begin with, George Yeaton met Dr. Merrill at the station to take him to the Pomona meeting. It had rained and was still misting so there were holes in the road but filled with water. You recall we only had gravel roads and they were rather rough. The car they took to meet Dr. Merrill with was a two-seated Ford and was started by a crank in the front.

The train was late and Dr. Merrill always insisted on being prompt but this time it looked as if he was going to be late for a meeting. As soon as they got going he told George to speed the car up so that they would still be on time. Dr. Merrill was on the rear seat and George drove for about five miles over the rough road just as fast as he dared. All of a sudden Dr. Merrill tapped George heavily on the shoulder, yelling "Stop. Stop at once I say."

George slammed on the brakes and the car came to a stop right in a huge puddle, the engine stalling.

"What is the matter, Dr. Merrill?"

"Oh, I just thought I would like to see how it seemed to sit on the seat for a minute. Now you can continue."

Poor George. He had to get out, stand right in a mud puddle to crank the car which wasn't easy because the carburetor had become wet.

The first speaker was Prof. Simmons. He gave a very long lecture and George went to sleep during this period. Dr. Merrill was to follow so he woke George up when it was about time for him to talk saying "If you go to sleep when I'm talking, I'll charge you 50 cents."

George replied "It will be worth it, Dr. Merrill, it will be worth it."

Increasing Hog Production

It was during this period when "Gramps was in Piscataquis County that Dr. Merrill, besides being director of Extension, was also Food Commissioner for the State of Maine. The government had asked him to start a campaign to get the State of Maine to increase its food production.

Dr. Merrill came up to see "Gramps one day and said to him "Joe you are just the man we need to increase hog growing in the State of Maine. I would like to have you set up something here and then get some figures to make sure that it will also give the farmers a fair profit for their efforts. When this is done, we are going to give you a three month "vacation" to go around the state giving demonstrations in all the other counties. Remember how you wrote a thesis on hog feeding while you were at college. From that thesis, we know that you are our man for this job. So, get the project started just as soon as possible".

"Gramps" got Ralph Gray of Dover to agree to carry on a demonstration. A self feeder was built and a special ration was mixed to use in it. To begin with they weight eight pigs, each about 6 weeks old. Every week thereafter they weighed the pigs, or had someone else weigh them and record the weights, to see what the cost per pound of meat compared with the cost of the grain being fed. The records would then show when the pigs were sold, if a profit had been made, and if so, how much.

At the end of the demonstration period, it was found when the pigs were sold that the profit on each was \$12. With these figures at hand it was easy to get other farmers to copy Ralph Gray's example. Other farmers quickly moved to start similar projects. Some of them that "Gramps" recalls were Frank Draper of Parkman, Ernest Livermore of Sebec, John DeMerritt of Sangerville and Frank Merrill of South Dover. John DeMerritt had the largest number with 52 pigs on a self feeder.

Then one day Dr. Merrill called "Gramps" and said "Joe, we have a demonstration set up for you. Maurice Jones wants you to come to his place. There will be a lot of farmers there to hear what you have been doing up in Piscataquis County with self feeders for hogs." Dr. Merrill himself was there to start the meeting.

"Gramps" had reached that part of the story at the meeting where he told of feeding by the new self feeder plan. One farmer said "Just how big does one make a self feeder?"

"Gramps" answered him "We are going to make one here today big enough for 10 pigs. You can make yours bigger or smaller in proportion depending on the number of pigs you wish to feed."

As "Gramps" continued with his work in the county, new State specialists were hired to help with specific problems in the various counties. There were probably more sheep in Piscataquis County than any other county in the state. One of the specialists hired

by Dr. Merrill was a veterinarian to help control the Nodula disease in sheep and intestinal worms in pigs. He asked “Gramps” to take the vet on field trips in his county and formulate a demonstration for their control. This they did and five community meetings were held for the Nodula disease. They waited to see the results and when they proved good, “Gramps” went on to hold further demonstrations in other counties. Of course, “Gramps” had worked at the Experimental Station and had taken many courses in veterinary medicine.

John DeMerritt, a young farmer in Sangerville, asked “Gramps” to hold a demonstration in control of intestinal worms in pigs. More than 45 farmers from surrounding territories came to see the demonstration.

After driving the pigs into a pen to administer the solution into them, “Gramps” was holding the solution and John was holding the pigs.

John was always trying to get some joke on “Gramps”, so he grabbed one pig and held it with its head in the air near “Gramps” and said “Hurry, put the solution in its mouth. It is squirming”.

“Gramps” replied “Put the pig on the ground. You will have to hold its head up while its four legs are on the ground. Other side the pig will choke to death in the position you are now holding it.”

The young farmer turned to the crowd and said “You know, I can’t have any fun at all with our County Agent. I deliberately held the pig that way just to play a joke on him and to see what he would say. I knew it would kill the pig if he administered the solution to the pig in the way I was holding it. Our County Agent certainly knows what he is doing”.

Thus, ends the adventure of Joseph Henry Bodwell, the first County Extension Agent in Piscataquis County. Joe passed away on November 15, 1974 in Farmington, Maine.

Patricia Leland Mereen shares some of her memories of “Gramps”. The Lelands and the Bodwells were great friends. To quote from her letter, “You must have guessed a little about his man from his writings. He was quite an egotist; very dynamic; super energetic and quite handsome! He had an annoying snuffle in his nose from an old football injury. There were tragedies in his life which must have taken its toll on him but he seems to overcome hardship. And always, he kept in touch with my father”.

I hope you have enjoyed this series of articles and thank Patricia for sharing with us.

*Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society
Mary Annis*